

A FEW MEMORIES OF GOLDSBORO

By Roy Epps
December 1981

Extracts from his Journal "Personal History of Fronzy Elroy Epps, Sr., Known as "Roy")

On September 29, 1925, I was blessed to enter my second estate, to be born. I first saw the light of day, an event I obviously don't remember, in a log constructed house located in the northwestern part of Wayne County, North Carolina some five miles more or less west of the town of Pikeville, N. C.

My mother, Bertie Obena Gwaltney Epps, gave birth to seven children. I was the fifth child and one of three male children and the only boy to live more than 24 hours. Two girls lived to adulthood, Christine (Chrystine) born on 28 September 1920 and Mary, born 13 October 1926. Our father was Alphonso Atkins Epps, also known as Fonzy or F.E. Epps.



Fonzy Atkins Epps



Bertie Obena Gwaltney



Christine



Mary



Roy

About ninety per cent of the population was rural and my parents were in this category, being poor tenant farmers. Sometime about 1928 we moved into a house on Franklin street, in the "Greenleaf" community of the city of Goldsboro, N.C. It was a poor neighborhood then and nearly fifty years later it still is. The street was and is unpaved, full of rough spots and lined with poorly constructed frame houses. We lived there only a few months and then moved to another house on the same street. This is the house I remember as my first home, in 1929, I was four years old. The house still stands, I don't know the house number. We did not have a street number assigned to us.



Two houses still standing on E. Frank Road, Greenleaf area, Goldsboro April 2015.

This was the year the "great depression" hit the nation. My father had become a kitchen oil stove salesman dealing in used and new stoves. Apparently he was quite successful, in fact, he was fortunate to have employment of any kind during the depression.

My earliest recollection of a specific incident (and accident) was the dropping of a piece of concrete drain tile on my foot and severely cutting a toe. Mary, my younger sister, was helping me carry it, she accidentally dropped her end of the tile and it struck my toe. I ran crying and screaming through the house, slinging blood as I went, calling for my mother. She was in the back yard. After Mama washed and bandaged it, gave me some loving assurance, I was on the road to recovery.

During my early childhood I enjoyed digging in the ground, I was like a gopher or a dog with a bone. It is surprising I didn't become a miner. On one occasion I dug a hole beneath the house large enough for Mary and me to sit in. We built a fire in the hole, not realizing the real threat it was to our house. Smoke came out from under the house and caused quite a bit of excitement until the source of the fire was determined and extinguished.

On another occasion I was playing hide-and-seek at night with several other children. I was running in the darkness and collided with my cousin ("Knotty", Darwin Earl Gwaltney, he lived about 1/3 of a mile east of us on a farm, his birthday is the same day as mine but he is one year older) hitting him in the mouth with my head. He lost two front teeth but having a very hard head I didn't suffer any injury. We were six or seven years old at the time . It was about this time in my life I tried boxing with gloves for the first and only time. The experience of being hit on the head and face was not and still is not appealing to me.



Darwin Earl "Knotty" Gwaltney

An event with great impact on my young mind occurred when I was about six or seven. My daddy brought home a small baby with a disability, a "club foot", I believe. I distinctly remember the baby being bathed in a galvanized wash tub. The distressing and unusual thing was ---the baby was fathered by my daddy out of wedlock by a woman I don't know. This was obviously very upsetting to my mother and all of us. Mary and I rode with daddy to take the baby home. Even at such an early age I felt something was very wrong.

In 1931-32 I attended the first grade of public school at "Walnut Street elementary school" in Goldsboro. It was located about 2 miles or more from our house. I walked both ways, rain or shine, cold or hot. Three events took place that year that I still remember with pain and discomfort. I fell down an embankment crossing over a railroad track and -received bruises and abrasions, as the old folks would say, "I skinned myself from head to toe". The second happening was very embarrassing, but a loving, understanding mother cleaned me and changed my clothing when I didn't make it to the toilet in time. (we didn't have a bathroom until I was 20 years old). At age six I had my one and only experience with tobacco. I don't remember where I acquired the dirty weed but I do remember chewing it and then getting very sick while walking along a dirt road on the way home from school.

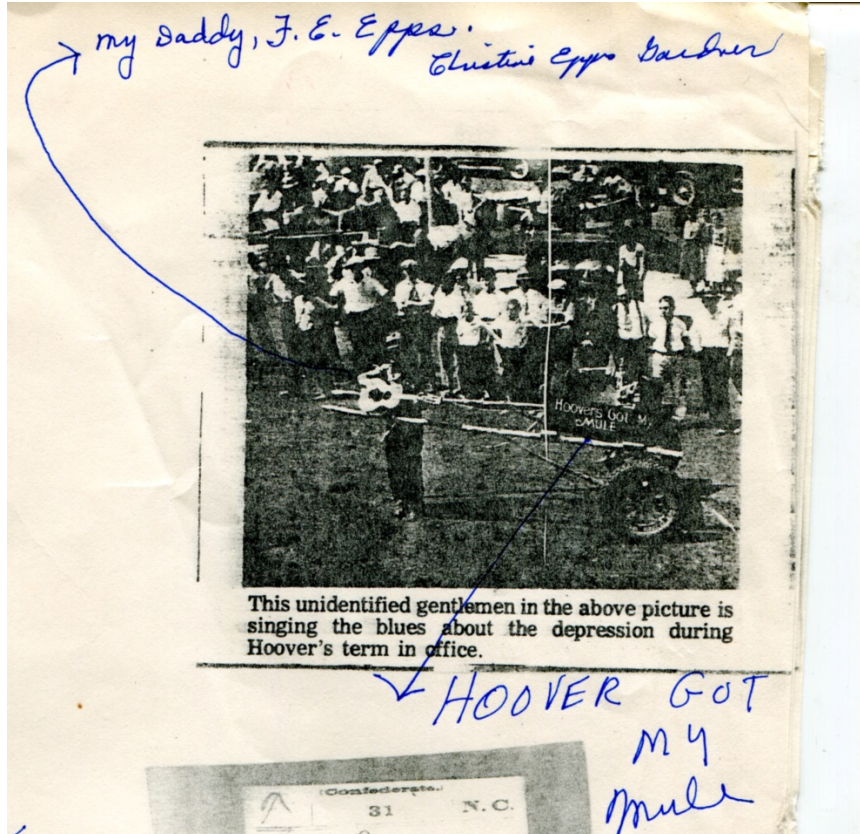


William Street School in Goldsboro.



Bertie

During my second year in school I attended the Virginia Street elementary school in Goldsboro. It too was located over two miles from home and I had to walk both ways. The year was uneventful for me except I came home one day with wet pants and it had not been raining. For the nation it was an historic year. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected, the depression had deepened and my daddy joined in street demonstration by driving a "hoover cart" (this was a mule drawn cart made from the axle and wheels of an automobile because people didn't have money to buy gas or repair the cars.). Banks were failing and many people lost their businesses and houses because of mortgage foreclosures. Throughout this time my mother did not alarm me but to the contrary. She was reassuring and frequently said how blessed we were to have a roof over our head, clothes on our backs (they were often patched but clean) and food in our stomachs.





Aunt Frankie and Uncle Cully (Frankie Anderson and Alphus McCullen Gwaltney)

I had my tin lunch box I carried to school. My mother was very proud and independent and would not take any kind of welfare assistance – not even free school lunches. That reminds me, about this time, during the summer, I was visiting my cousin "Knotty", as I often did, and his mother "Aunt Frankie" gave me a ham and biscuit". Well, one of their bird dogs wanted it . He knocked me down, took my biscuit and ham, then bit me to such an extend and in an area that I was unable to sit with any degree of comfort for several days. On several of "Knotty's" birthdays his father, "Uncle Cully", would Bar-b-cue a pig. It was also my birthday and I was invited . This was an exciting day for me and I truly appreciate their kindness and thoughtfulness. They would begin bar-b-cuing about 4 a.m. (60 - 80 pound pig over hot coals) so it would be ready around 12 or 1 o'clock. The aroma was terrific and about 10 or 11 we would begin to pull a rib or two. They had a model T coupe with a rumble seat and after eating we'd take a ride. That would always settle the big dinner we'd eaten.



Mary Sprion Home (left with two tall trees in front) Garage (seen between the two trees)
 Bertie Epps Home (on the right)
 Photo taken from Aunt Libby's (Bertie's sister) back yard.

In the summer of 1933 we moved about 1 mile north to a three acre plot of land that adjoined my grandparents (Gwaltney's). My mother purchased two acres from her father and he gave her one more acre. My father was apparently still being unfaithful to my mother (with a different woman) and my grandparents were trying to help us. When we first moved in the house it consisted of only two rooms, without ceilings or interior walls and the roof leaked. I remember we had to sit pots and buckets around in the house when it rained to catch the dripping water. Within a year we had two more rooms added and ceilings in the rooms and interior walls. Eventually we stopped most of the leaks in the roof.



The private dirt road looking south from Bertie's yard toward Fedelong Trail – in 1986.

A private dirt road about 200 yards long led to our house from the public road (unpaved in 1933) and was unpassable for cars in wet weather for several years. Our drinking water came from an open well, later a hand pump in the yard, then a hand pump in the kitchen about 1937 or 38. We used "chamber pots" and an outside toilet located across a ditch about fifty yards west of the house.

Compared to the conveniences of today it doesn't sound like much of a house but this was during the depression and it was paid for. We didn't have a mortgage hanging over our heads. We were blessed with good health and fertile soil. My mother planned and directed our efforts so we were self-sustaining. Every year we had a vegetable garden, raised chickens to eat and for eggs, raised hogs for meat, had fruit trees and grape vines. Then in 1937 we were able to get electricity and a refrigerator. After that, a milk cow. We had all that and a very loving and devoted mother. The major thing missing in our life was a husband and father.

I remember well the last night my daddy slept with me and told me he was leaving home and would not come back anymore. I cried myself to sleep. Every boy needs a daddy. Throughout my childhood my parent's divorce was (they were divorced in 1936) a source of sorrow and embarrassment. Add to that, we were the only "Mormons" in the community and very poor so far as money is concerned but we were rich in many other ways.



**6 July 1942. Baptism of Mrs. Isabelle Chestnutt Gwatney by Elder Gilbert McClain
(wife of Melvin Lee Gwaltney)
Location: Cogdell's Pond, Goldsboro, North Carolina**

In the summer of 1934 (June 14) I was playing in the dirt road by my grandmother Gwaltney's house when I heard my mother call and say to come in and wash up, I was going to be baptized . That evening after dark, I was baptized in Cogdell's fish pond located near U.S. Highway 70 one mile west of Goldsboro by the lights of an automobile. A missionary, Elder Darrell A. Sorensen, baptized me. I'm grateful to him. I hope he doesn't feel his mission was a failure if by chance I was the only dirty little unschooled boy he baptized. When I was 6 weeks old Elder Darrell G. Proctor blessed me. For that blessing I am grateful. Of course, both of these important events were brought about by a caring and loving mother



Darrell Alfred Sorensen, from Scipio,
Millard County, Utah Born: 30 Aug, 1911



Darrell Gardner Proctor from American Fork, Utah
Born: Jun. 28, 1901





Grandma Gwaltney
(Martha Taylor Gwaltney)



Bertie Gwaltney (Mama)

Mama was baptized on 26 April 1908 (at age 18). Her mother, Grandma Gwaltney, was baptized the same day. Six of her 9 children (2 died in infancy) were baptized. Daddy was baptized on 14 May 1916 (age 23), but was later excommunicated for his conduct. Neither of my grandfathers were baptized. I had two consistent prayers as a child and teenage boy; (1) my mother would live until I could take care of myself (she lived until August 4, 1961 and I was 36) (2) I would live to be married, have a family and never intentionally do anything to hurt them. Both prayers have been answered.

Mama taught us to pray daily. I remember kneeling in my floor length cotton gingham gown (it was soft and warm) by the fireplace and we'd pray. Our backs were to the fire and when we finished our backsides would be quite warm and I ran and jumped in bed. The bedrooms were unheated and sheets cold as ice so I'd pull my feet up into the gown until the bed got warm. Our bedding consisted of feathers in a ticking on open springs. During the night the fire would die out in the fireplace and water would freeze in the water bucket in the kitchen. I learned to dress rapidly in the mornings. It seems odd now, but I don't remember getting a cold very often. The house was uninsulated --snow could get in the house when the wind blew hard. The sleeping temperature was the same as the outside air.



In 1933-34 I attended a rural school, "Belfast Elementary School". This school was also over 2 miles from home and I walked both ways. My fourth, fifth and sixth year of schooling was obtained at Belfast. Nothing of any significance happened that year (3rd).



However, the fourth grade year was something else. My sister Mary and I walked to school, about 1 mile was along the railroad track (we lived adjacent to the railroad). One afternoon when we were about 300 or 400 yards from home I put a piece of steel plate, the kind that holds the track on the cross ties, on the rail to see what would happen. (in the past we had put crossed straight pins on the tracks for the train to mash them together.). We watched the next train go by, nothing happened so we forgot about it. We forgot about it that is, until a couple days later two policemen came to the school and took us home and questioned us. It wasn't any problem for them to get a confession. I had been taught to tell the truth, "even if it hurts". I told them all that happened, as soon as I stopped crying.



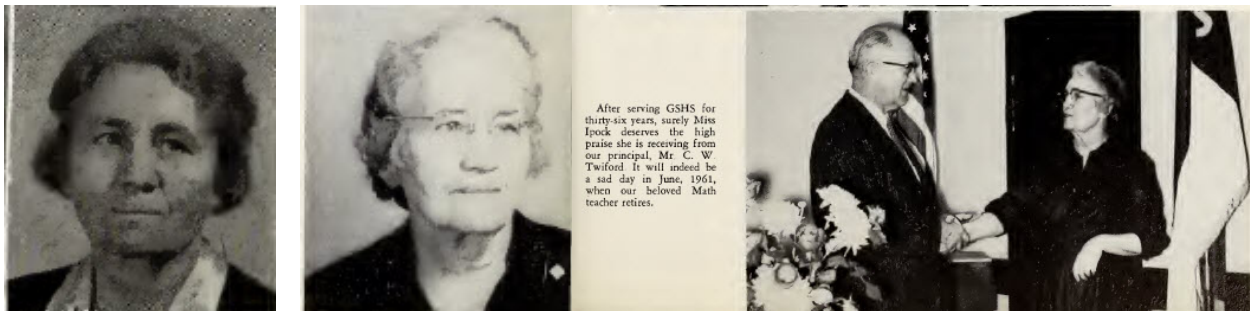
Wayne County Courthouse

The officers then took me to the courthouse and the juvenile judge gave a lecture and warning. No fine or other penalty was imposed. None was needed, I was fully rehabilitated at age 10. It was a childish and dangerous thing to do. At that time I couldn't comprehend the seriousness of my act.

I believe it was about the same time a wasp stung me between the eyes and caused them to swell almost completely closed. That was followed by the measles and severe case of "sore eyes". Mary had the same illness and we couldn't tolerate any direct light. Covers were placed over the windows for several days. It was during this time Mary and I ate our first lettuce. My aunt Libby (Mama's sister) brought us a special salad. We took a bite of the lettuce and spit it out, saying that sure was bad cabbage.



I really got a bang out of going to school in the fifth grade. We were having an informal baseball game during a play period and I was standing some six or eight feet from the batter waiting my turn at bat. The batter was using a ball bat with the handle broken off at the small end. The bat slipped from his grip as he swung for a home run and the fat part of the bat hit me directly and squarely on the forehead. I was knocked out instantly. A spray of stars exploded in my mind, similar to those emitted by a "sparkler". When I came around, the teacher suggested I go home for the day. My sister Mary walked with me the two miles home. My head began to swell and again my vision was temporarily impaired. I stayed home for two days. It left a permanent crevice in my forehead (skull) that is still visible to this day. One benefit I derived from the accident was an alibi, when someone said, what's wrong with you, I could say, I got hit on the head with a baseball bat.



Miss Janie Ipock, mathematics teacher.

I attended the seventh grade in Goldsboro at the William Street Elementary school. We did not have junior high schools. It was the only year I had a perfect school year attendance. I was neither absent or tardy. It was also the only year I rode a school bus. My teacher was a kind, sensitive person, a Miss Janie Ipock. This was the school year 1937-38 and the "great depression" was beginning to loose its grip on our country. I still remember going hungry at lunch time on several occasions rather Than take advantage of the "free lunch" (welfare) that was offered. In the summer of 1938 at the age of 12 I was offered my first regular, public job. Prior to that time, any money I had earned was as a farm laborer, barning tobacco, picking cotton and other odd jobs.



Bertie Epps at her kitchen table



Bertie on her porch.

At age 15 my childhood days were behind me, I was an adolescent. In looking back, I remember my childhood as being a happy time. There were many problems and challenges, obstacles to overcome, continuous work or so it seemed but the negatives in my life were not emphasized. My mother dwelled upon the positive things. **Count your blessings, be thankful for good food, clothing, shelter and membership in the church.** She also said, **"two wrongs doesn't make anything right", "waste not and want not", "let a sleeping dog lie", "it's better to have a dog your friend than your enemy", "we'll buy it when our ship comes in", "you may be ragged but you can be clean", "cleanliness is next to godliness", "if you play with fire you'll get burned", "idle hands is the devil's workshop", and "a bird in the hand is worth two in a bush".**

These sayings were not original with her, of course, but they were part of her philosophy. She taught me to respect authority and my elders, to say **"sir"** and **"mam"**.



Albert Johnson Jefferson Davis Stonewall Jackson Stephen Lee Gwaltney,
with his grand daughter, Sara in 1929

There was another event I remember quite well that occurred on April 2, 1934 (I was 8 years old). My grandpa Gwaltney dropped dead from a heart attack about 1/2 mile from his home. They lived next door to us. He apparently was walking home from Talton's grocery store. He was born during the civil war while the south was winning, as his name would suggest. I was very proud when I learned his name, Albert Johnson Jefferson Davis Stonewall Jackson Steven Lee Gwaltney. His friends called him Albert. Grandpa's funeral was held in his house. I remember seeing mama sitting in the kitchen before the funeral crying, this was very upsetting to me. At the graveside they sang the church hymn "*God be with You 'til We Meet Again*". I thought it was the saddest song I'd ever heard sung. Then the dirt was thrown in on top of the coffin. The "thudding" sound it made still rings in my ears today. I mentioned this funeral to my sister Mary a few weeks ago and she too, remembered the song and sadness that prevailed that day. It was the first time I ever heard my mother cry.



George Sholar

Bro. George Sholar, an elder in the Goldsboro branch conferred the Aaronic priesthood upon me and ordained me a deacon on June 11, 1939. For some reason, I don't know why, I was never ordained a teacher. However, on March 28, 1943, bro. Lathan Wiggins ordained me a priest.



Lathan and Pauline Wiggins

Our branch was small throughout my childhood. Average attendance was about 25 or 30. It was like one big family. A great deal of importance was placed on attending Sunday school. Each year everyone who had a perfect attendance was recognized. We did not have a car and walked to and from nearly all our meetings, a distance of about one mile each way. Even with this challenge, Christine had nine years, Mary five years and I had eight years perfect attendance. This is evidence of not only faith and self-discipline but of enjoying the great blessing of good health and the example of a loving mother.

The branch was too small to have all the church programs. We did not have scouts, a.p.-y.w. (m.i.a.), priesthood meeting, or seminary. We did have on a regular basis Sunday school, sacrament meeting, relief society and at times primary.

Mama was the relief society president for seventeen years and grandma Gwaltney taught a Sunday school class for about forty years. We met in a small wood constructed chapel located in the "greenleaf" community on the north side of Goldsboro. It was, as I remember about 25 feet wide and 50 feet long. There were rows of pine benches (pews) on each side and a center isle. A large wood and coal pot-bellied stove was in the isle. Curtains on wire were used to partition the room into three areas for class rooms.



Goldsboro Greenleaf Branch – inside the chapel

During the 1940's
Goldsboro, N.C.
Greenleaf Chapel



Greenleaf Branch Members.

Quarterly district conferences were held in those years in the Courtroom in the Wayne County courthouse. I found sitting in the balcony exciting and different from sitting on the benches in our small chapel. An act of reverence that was effectively taught me as a child was to fold my arms all during "sacrament" blessing and passing. I still practice that and remain silent, usually trying to meditate on the sacrifice our Savior made for us.



L-R

R-1 Bill Sadler, Joann Gwaltney, Carolyn Malpass, Dolores Sauls
Betty Rose Gwaltney

R-2 Libbie Sadler, Virginia Gwaltney, Martha Gwaltney, Mary Epps
Annie Morgan, Frankie Gwaltney

R-3 Paul Sadler, Carl Malpass, Mildred Malpass holding Carl Edwin
Bertie Epps, Sara Dean Gwaltney, Lucille Blackman,
Isabelle Gwaltney

R-4 Cullen Gwaltney, Rudolph Gwaltney

I began working that summer (1941) every Wednesday as a clerk to the Auctioneer, Mr. Claude W. Foushee, at John F. Hobbs stockyards. They were located about 300 or 400 yards from our house. Christine was responsible for me getting the job. Mr. Hobbs paid me \$5.00 per day which was very good since I had been riding a bicycle 150 miles a week to earn \$5.00 to \$6.00. The disadvantage was it required me to miss 1 day of school each week. (20%).

I sat next to Mr. Foushee as he auctioned off the animals. Each animal had a number on a tag stuck to their rump. I recorded the number, the price the animal sold for and name of the purchaser. If I got behind they had to stop the auction. Mr. Foushee seemed always in a hurry and he had a Favorite saying he often repeated, "hurry up, I've got a date with an egg and I don't want to break it." About 1942 or '43 the stockyard barns burned to the ground. They were rebuilt and a short time later John F. Hobbs was killed in a traffic accident (John Farrington Hobbs, born 10 Aug 1897, died 24 Jul 1946) .



John F. Hobbs stockyard fire.

My grandpa, James Charlie epps, died on February 21, 1942. I was a pall bearer at his funeral (age 15). Grandpa Epps and Grandma Epps were good, clean living Pentacostal holiness. They lived to be over 85. I remember visiting them several times as a child and they always had a smile and some good biscuits and potatoes.



James Charlie Epps and Family



James Charlie Epps funeral.



James Charlie Epps Funeral. Roy Epps is on the right side, nearest the steps.

June of 1942 finally arrived and it was graduation time for the seniors of Goldsboro High School (all of us). Again, I experienced ambivalent feelings -- happiness -- embarrassment -- joy and resentment. I had not seen daddy for months -- maybe years -- then suddenly -- he was standing there in the hall as we prepared to go on stage for our diplomas -- he muttered something -- I didn't really understand -- handed me a package -- my graduation present -- a gold "Elgin" pocket watch and chain; but where had he been all those years I really needed him? I was wearing a clean, white shirt, tie and trousers, no coat -- I couldn't afford the price of a suit or even a sport coat.

Happiness -- Mama, Christine and Mary were in the audience -- I had reached a major milestone in my life -- they were proud -- I was excited and felt exhilaration -- a new beginning -- challenge and uncertainty lay ahead.



Roy Epps at the smokehouse



Roy and Bertie

Grandma Gwaltney fell and broke her hip in 1947... and was confined to a wheelchair and walker for seven years. She moved into the house with my Mother. Mama nursed her until grand mama died on Christmas Day, 1958.

Back: Bertie Obena Gwaltney, Martha Elizabeth Taylor, Jack Harding Gardner



Front: Jack Elroy, Bronson Rea, Christine Gardner

Martha died December 25, 1957. The photo was printed the month after she died.



Martha Elizabeth Taylor Gwaltney



Grandma Gwaltney, with her children, Libby, Cullen and Bertie. Her son, Royal is in the picture on the wall behind her.



Martha Elizabeth Taylor Gwaltney
known as Grandma Mattie "Matt" Gwaltney

But in 1954 Grandma had a stroke that left her paralyzed, unable to speak clearly and confined to her bed. Mama would not leave her, and stayed with her nearly 24 hours a day, seven days a week for four years. Grandma died on Christmas day in 1958. In the meantime, Mama began to suffer from hardening of the arteries in her brain, and the slow but steady deterioration of her mind and body began in 1957. It was irreversible, the doctor said, and he proved to be tragically right.

The winter and spring of 1959 was basically the same as the fall of 1958 except Mama's health was such she could not be left safely alone. We agreed with my sister Mary, who lived next door to Mama that we---our family and hers---would each keep Mama six weeks at a time , and this we did. Every six weeks we drove to Goldsboro, about a six or seven hour drive (no interstate highway) , and we'd bring Mama home with us to stay with us for six weeks and then take her to Mary's home. My other sister, Christine, was living in California.

Toward the end of 1960, Mama's health was failing fast and we admitted her---my sister Mary actually made the arrangement---to a home for the aged where she could have constant attention.

Sometime in May of 1961, I admitted Mama as a patient at Dorothea Dix hospital in Raleigh. She needed constant medical attention and regular medication. She could no longer communicate rationally, and physically she was losing weight. It was a very sad day for me.

Mama's death was sad, but we had been mourning for her a long time. She is buried in the Gwaltney family Cemetery in Wayne County just west of the new Wayne Memorial Hospital.



The entrance to the Gwaltney Family Cemetery.





Dorothea Dix Mental Hospital, Raleigh NC.

Our next door neighbors during the years 1938-42 was Mr. Charles C. and Anne R. Christenbury. He was employed as a lineman by the western union and she was a housewife. They had two daughters, Virginia, who was a year or two younger than me and Anne Mae, who was a year or so older. They were fine people. However, Mrs. Christenbury developed a mental condition that required her to be institutionalized in 1944 or 1945. They were living in Raleigh at the time.

An interesting event took place on august 4, 1961 that none of us could have foreseen in 1941. My mother was admitted to Dorthea Dix Mental Health hospital in May of 1961 with a severe and advanced case of hardening of the arteries in her brain. Mrs. Annie R. Christenbury and my mother both died the same day in the same hospital and their bodies were returned to Goldsboro on the same hearse by Seymour's funeral home. Do you think they had a spiritual reunion that day? I do!

(Annie R. Christenbury was born Mar 16,1900 and died Aug 4, 1961)
Mother: Lula Florence Baughn Father: William Price Roberts

"I REMEMBER GRANDMA"

(Oct. 1, 1869 - Dec. 25, 1957)

I remember Grandma as a Lady
that was old,
But a Lady with kindness and
love untold;
Love for her neighbors regardless
of race,
And kindness for all who stopped
by her place;
Kind to the crippled chicks and
dogs without a home,
She nursed and fed them 'till
they could roam.



Martha "Mattie" Elizabeth Taylor Gwaltney

Grandma Gwaltney

I remember Grandma, a great teller
of tales was she,
Fabulous fables of fairies and scarey
tales of witchery,
These she told with gusto, and we
just giggled with glee,
She was more exciting than the
westerns on TV;
And after the stories, 'twas time for
sweets you see,
Cause Grandma wanted us happy,
happy as could be.

I remember Grandma, for giving me
my greatest gift in life,
An introduction to a lovely girl who
later became my wife.
Grandma has left us, gone from this
world of sin,
But she left her mark of goodness
upon all her grandchildren.
Jesus, I know, will reign on that
Great Judgment Day,
That I may live worthy to see her then,
I humbly pray!

- by Fonzy Elroy Epps -